

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Rhino Foods Inc.

Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center

Rhino Foods Inc.

Client Profile:

Rhino Foods, Inc., located in Burlington, Vermont, produces ice cream novelties, inclusions, and other specialty food products. The company grew from a husband and wife run ice cream shop in the Champlain Mill in Winooski, Vermont, selling ice cream cookie sandwiches to a 140-person company selling ice cream ingredients to the major industry players in just 20 years.

Situation:

Rhino Foods owner and founder, Ted Castle, imbued the growing company with strong principles, which helped guide the company through its early years of growth. Focusing on the softer side of control systems, his natural, coaching-based leadership style nurtured new talent brought into the company, providing ongoing guidance and feedback. As the company grew, a two-level management structure was developed which allowed delegation of operational issues from Castle. Development of the senior management team in particular was becoming a concern, specifically around planning, execution and reporting. Rhino Foods contacted the Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center (VMEC), a NIST MEP network affiliate, to assist in developing plans.

Solution:

VMEC Professional Business Advisors (PBAs) developed an operational planning process built on the existing organically developed systems, extending those systems to the next level. Using an Excel-based project management system, VMEC led the Rhino management team through a planning process focused on Key Focus Areas for the next year, and coached team members in using the system as it became habitual. The process of developing this system gave the team opportunities to look at the business and their responsibilities from a different, longer-term perspective. New language around value stream mapping and corporate DNA was introduced. Team members attended VMEC workshops to increase their familiarity with the terminology and experience related techniques. Resulting discussions led Rhino to select VMEC to lead its strategic planning process in December 2003.

Using a combination of theory and experience, VMEC led the management team through the process of developing a vision, building on their existing Purpose, Principles and Vision, which had been formulated years before. Leading them through this intense process allowed the Purpose, Principles and Vision to be tweaked to reflect each team member's unique perspectives, thus allowing more personal ownership. The result was a revised Purpose, Principles and Vision, which the entire management team could stand behind.

The process then swung in to developing a set of strategic objectives, with metrics that fed down to metrics generated during operational planning. The overall system was refined to form a cohesive, coordinated metric driven management system fully aligned with the corporate Purpose, Principles and Vision.

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Rhino Foods redesigned their entire planning process, beginning with near-term operational issues, moving to the 10-year time frame through strategic planning, then refining both through a system of cascading performance metrics designed to align with and reinforce the new purpose, principles and vision. The senior management team experienced a dramatic increase in alignment, awareness of how their actions affect the long term strategic goals and more direct feedback on them.

Results:

- * Redesigned management system fully aligned with corporate Purpose, Principles and Vision.
- * Identified system inefficiencies and reduction of wastes through value stream mapping.

Testimonial:

"As Rhino grew, I knew I had to develop a senior management team to become real decision makers in the business. They knew their areas of expertise better than I did, but needed to agree on a common management system emphasizing mutual accountability to allow them to really own the Key Focus Areas and the Long Term Strategic Objectives. VMEC's Lee Bryan and Lisa Henderson led us through the process of revamping our planning so efficiently, and with a great combination of advanced up to date theory and their own experiences in the real world that we looked on it as a lot of fun. They did an incredible job of keeping us on point, while still making sure all inputs were considered and incorporated into the final system, which is now stable. Rhino's management team is working with it as their primary method of control, and are beginning to use the language and concepts with the people who report to them. The effects of this are beginning to be felt throughout the organization, which is leading us to examine the whole business from a value stream perspective. Even this is helping us identify system inefficiencies and reduce waste. When we embark on programs to really develop those within Rhino Foods, I'm sure we will experience another level of performance."

Ted Castle, CEO